## DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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## ALLIGATORS RECLASSIFIED IN NINE LOUISIANA PARISHES: HUNTS NOW POSSIBLE

American alligators in nine parishes of Louisiana have been reclassified from "threatened" status to a less restrictive "threatened (similarity of appearance)" category by the Interior Department's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The final rulemaking was published in the June 25, 1979, Federal Register. The change in status reflects an increase in alligator numbers in the nine parishes, but retains some Federal protection to protect alligators in other areas where the species is still in jeopardy.

The nine parishes, or counties, are located primarily within Louisiana's coastal zone and include the following: Iberia, St. Mary, Terrebonne, Lafourche, St. Charles, Jefferson, Plaquemines, St. Bernard, and St. Tammany.

The major effect of the reclassification will be to permit a controlled harvest of alligators in the nine parishes in accordance with State laws and Federal regulations. Alligators in three other Louisiana parishes—Cameron, Vermilion, and Calcasieu—have been classified "threatened (similarity of appearance)" since 1975. The State of Louisiana has held several controlled alligator hunts in the three parishes.

Once in danger of extinction throughout most of its range, the American alligator has made a remarkable comeback in recent years under strict Federal and State protection. The U.S. alligator population is now estimated

(over)

to total close to 1 million. In 1977, about 75 percent of U.S. alligators were reclassified from the endangered species list to the threatened list. ("Endangered" means that a species is in danger of extinction throughout all or a significant portion of its range. "Threatened," a less dire status, means that a species may become endangered within the foreseeable future.)

Because of substantial increases in alligator numbers in 1976 the Governor of Louisiana petitioned the Fish and Wildlife Service to remove the American alligator from the endangered and threatened lists in southern Louisiana parishes. The Service has reviewed all available data and has determined that the American alligator is no longer biologically threatened in the nine parishes listed above.

Instead of removing all Federal protection from these populations, however, the Service has reclassified them to "threatened (similarity of appearance)." Alligators in this category are not considered to be biologically threatened, but some restrictions on commercial activities involving them must still be imposed to aid law enforcement because they are indistinguishable from other alligator populations that are listed as endangered or threatened.

Although some alligator populations have increased, the continued modification of alligator habitat by humans and the past history of commercial exploitation of the species still gives cause for concern about the alligator's future. The American alligator remains listed as endangered in Mississippi, Alabama, North Carolina, Arkansas, Oklahoma, and inland areas of South Carolina, Georgia, Louisiana, and Texas, and as threatened in Florida and coastal areas of South Carolina, Georgia, and Texas.

The present rulemaking affects only the classification of alligators in the nine Louisiana parishes. Final decisions have not yet been made on other proposals concerning alligators, including a proposed rule change to allow limited sales of meat from legally taken alligators.